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ABSTRACT

The final report of the Texas Childhood Hunger Identification Project (Texas CHIP), this document describes the most comprehensive study of childhood hunger undertaken in Texas. Through enumeration and interviewing methods, low-income families from 27 counties in Texas were analyzed in the areas of income allocation, food frequency, homelessness, and food assistance program participation to determine the extent of childhood hunger. Findings indicated 1 in 9 children under age 12 is hungry in Texas; that hungry families are working, but don't make enough money to feed their children; and that food assistance programs provide an important defense against hunger for low-income families. The report offers specific recommendations, including the maintenance of entitlement status of current federal food assistance programs because they were found to fill in gaps resulting from economic instability. (Programs found to be helpful include the Food Stamp Program and National School Lunch Program.) Secondly, access to and improvements of programs in place should be expanded. Finally, community partnerships should be formed to develop greater food security for low-income families. Lawmakers, communities, and individuals must work together to eliminate childhood hunger. (SD)

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The Texas Childhood Hunger Identification Project

Final Report

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About the Center for Public Policy Priorities

Located in Austin, Texas, the Center for Public Policy Priorities (CPPP) is an office of the Benedictine Resource Center (BRC), a San Antonio-based not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of low-income Texans. CPPP analyzes public policy decisions affecting low-income and disadvantaged Texans and conducts research on topics such as hunger and nutrition, poverty, income security, health and human services funding, and the Texas tax system. CPPP also acts as a clearinghouse on community based anti-hunger initiatives, barriers to food and nutrition programs in local communities and state and federal food and nutrition policy through the Texas Anti-Hunger Network (TxAHN), a program funded by a Community Food and Nutrition Program grant administered by the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs.

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The Texas Childhood Hunger Identification Project

Final Report

March 1995

A Project of the Center for Public Policy Priorities

Dedication

The Texas Childhood Hunger Identification Project
is dedicated
to the memory of Congressman Mickey Leland,
who worked tirelessly
on behalf of children around the world
to alleviate hunger
both through public policy leadership
and in direct service innovation.
Until his tragic death in 1989,
Congressman Leland was a staunch advocate
for the well-being of children everywhere.

It is to this legacy of
compassionate and informed activism
that this project is dedicated.

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Recommendations (page 23)	Richard S. Orton
Conclusion (page 31)	Claudia M. Lizárraga

This Report has been prepared with the technical assistance of the National Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project of the Food Research and Action Center, Inc. in Washington, D.C. *Design of the project was assisted by the CCHIP Technical Advisory Committee, comprised of prominent professionals with expertise in the areas encompassed by this multi-faceted problem. The CCHIP Survey Questionnaire was used with the permission of the Connecticut Association for Human Services, Inc., which retains all rights to the Questionnaire.*

We would like to thank the National CCHIP staff for their tireless dedication to the success of this project. We are indebted to Project Director, Cheryl A. Wehler, and Research Assistant, Valerie Wehler, for their leadership throughout this project. We would also like to extend our thanks to Advanced Automation for data input and Jennifer Anderson, Ph.D. for statistical consultation, as well as, John Anthony and Jane Evans for their computer programming.

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The Center for Public Policy Priorities would like to take this opportunity to recognize a special member of the Technical Advisory Committee. King Cox, the Director of Benefit Services for the Texas Department of Human Services, provided invaluable information to Texas CHIP on the Food Stamp program and its recipients in Texas, and shared his perspective on changes that would better serve those in need in our state. Mr. Cox died in November of 1994. His compassion for those in need will be remembered and his leadership will be greatly missed

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every day, a large number of Texas parents must decide between buying groceries and paying rent, between feeding their children and heating their homes, between sending their children to school after a good breakfast or sending them to school in shoes. Every day, these parents must make decisions about allocating the limited financial resources at their command. And every day, children go hungry in Texas.

There is a perception, on the part of the general public and some policy makers, that hunger exists only among displaced families, families in crisis, or homeless individuals. The need among these groups is more apparent because it is so much more visible. It is hard to ignore when faced with the visible specter of long lines at soup kitchens and individuals sleeping on park benches or living in cars.

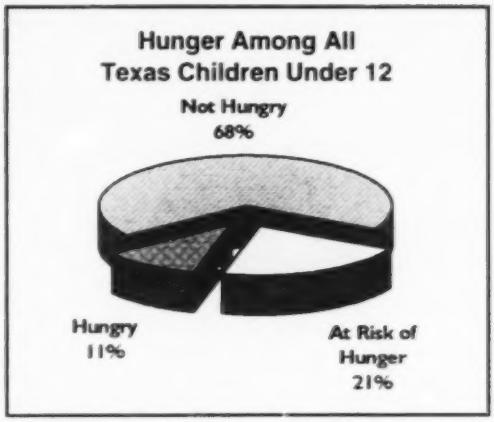
However, for thousands of low income families across this state — resourceful families with jobs, homes, and a willingness to work to better their children's lives — a struggle with hunger is a daily occurrence. These are the invisible victims of hunger — the families and children who are deprived of their most basic need.

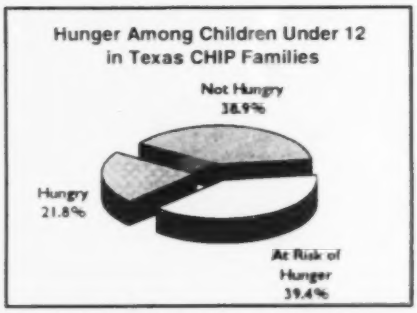
The Texas Childhood Hunger Identification Project (Texas CHIP) is the most comprehensive study of childhood hunger ever undertaken in Texas. Using a nationally tested survey instrument, Texas CHIP conducted in-depth interviews with low-income families across a twenty-seven county region in Texas to describe the prevalence of childhood hunger in those families, the survey site and Texas as a whole. Families interviewed had household incomes at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty guidelines ($2,151 per month for a family of four at the time of the survey), and at least one child under the age of 12. The results of these interviews and the findings of the study are startling.

Finding #1:

ONE IN NINE CHILDREN UNDER 12 ARE HUNGRY IN TEXAS

Perhaps the most alarming finding of all is the prevalence of hunger among children under twelve in Texas. Data gathered from the Texas CHIP site indicate that one in every nine Texas children under twelve suffers from hunger. This translates to 383,988 children — more than all the children in El Paso, Beaumont and Brownsville combined. When including children who might be at risk of hunger, the numbers are an even more astounding, 1.1 million children, or 1 in 3 Texas children.





In looking at low-income families the statistics are equally dramatic. For example, of children in low-income families surveyed by the Texas CHIP, 21.8 percent were hungry and 38.9 percent were at risk of hunger. The data translate into 117,600 hungry children and an additional 212,819 children at risk of hunger in the study site. Childhood hunger of this magnitude has enormous costs for both individual children and for Texas.

A study on hunger released by Tufts University in 1993 identified a direct causal link between arrested cognitive development among children who are chronically undernourished. "Perhaps the greatest costs associated with undernourishment among children are the more intangible ones," says the study. "In economic terms, these are 'opportunity' costs — the costs of lost opportunity in which productivity with financial benefits would otherwise occur."[1]

The Texas CHIP study confirms children from hungry families experience nearly twice the number of health problems as children from non-hungry households. Hungry children suffer from increased fatigue and irritability, more frequent headaches and ear infections, and a decreased ability to concentrate. This increased incidence of illness has serious repercussions for school attendance and learning. For each spell of illness, hungry children missed an average of 1.5 days of school.

Finding #2:

Hungry Families Are Working But Don't Make Enough Money to Feed Their Children

One of the most disquieting findings of the Texas CHIP is the number of hungry families who can be classified as the "working poor." In Texas, having a job is no guarantee against hunger. Fully 70.1 percent of hungry Texas CHIP families were "working poor." These were families that had at least one member employed, and still had inadequate resources to meet all their family's food and nutrition needs. On average, Texas CHIP respondents from hungry families worked 34.3 hours per week at an average wage of $6.34 per hour. Seventy percent of households interviewed had an additional adult — beside the respondent — who contributed to the support and care of the children, and these adults in hungry households worked an average of 37.9 hours per week for an average wage of $7.06 per hour. (See Table 1)

The likelihood of experiencing hunger or being at risk of hunger is related to income. The prevalence of hunger among Texas CHIP families increases as their levels of income decrease. The data show poverty as a strong indicator of whether or not families will be able to adequately feed their children. The Texas CHIP findings reveal the prevalence of hunger increases the further household income falls below the poverty level.

Income of Hungry Families	
Average monthly income	$986.57
Average income per capita	$208.46
Percent of Hungry Families who had no income for a period of time during the last year	32.3%
Average income of a Hungry Family as a percent of the federal poverty guidelines	73.7%

Table 1

Finding #3:

Food Assistance Programs Provide an Important Defense Against Hunger for Low-Income Families

One positive and successful way in which Americans have tried to stem the tide of childhood hunger in this country is through the implementation of food and nutrition programs designed to help families feed their children. These programs not only address immediate hunger needs, but are important temporary supports as families work toward self-sufficiency.

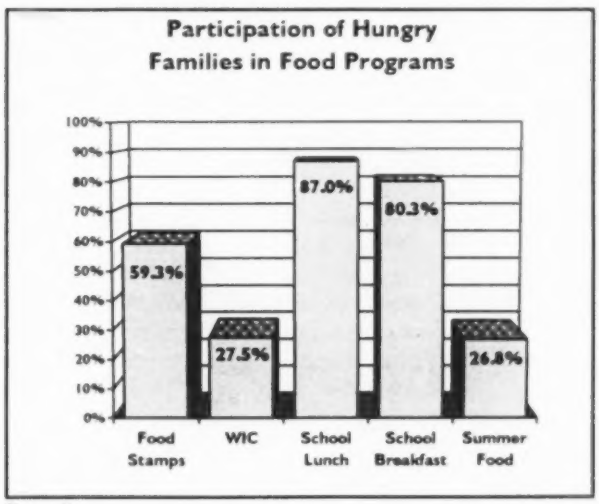


Figure 2

Families cannot fight hunger alone. Curbing the incidence of hunger in this country will take both political and economic will. Initiatives to build self-sufficiency must be combined with continued support for food and nutrition assistance if we are to see an end to hunger and its enormous societal costs.

Texas CHIP families participate in all the major federally funded food programs: Food Stamps, WIC, School Lunch, School Breakfast and Summer Food. Hungry families, in particular, rely upon these programs to feed their families. (See Figure 2) However, many hungry families who are eligible to receive program benefits are not currently participating in those programs. Most notably, 32.3 percent of hungry families are eligible for food stamps and not receiving them and 35.9 percent of hungry families are eligible — both categorically and by income — for WIC and not receiving WIC benefits. The main reason for hungry families not participating in food and nutrition programs was the mistaken belief that they were not eligible.

Recommendations

Knowing the extent of the problem, the barriers identified by families in their efforts to feed their children, and the parents' desire to work, we believe concrete steps can be taken to begin the end of childhood hunger in Texas.

Family Economic Security: The Real Solution

The first step in ending childhood hunger in Texas is achieving economic security for all families. The evidence shows adequate incomes could alleviate hunger. Therefore, our first recommendation is to ensure the economic security of families. This is a long-term goal which includes intensive job training, a basic support system emphasizing child care, transportation and other support services necessary for working parents to continue working, and finally, adequate wages to lift families out of poverty.

Improving Current Food and Nutrition Programs: The Interim Steps

Short of building family economic security, we believe there are many intermediate steps that need to be taken to positively affect childhood hunger. Texas CHIP data show many families turned to federal food and nutrition assistance programs when their incomes prove insufficient in feeding their children. In addition, the data illustrate many, despite their need, were unable to access these programs or were ill-informed about how they work. This report makes recommendations for improving food and nutrition assistance programs to ensure families in need have a network of services to address their immediate and longer term food needs while they work toward self-sufficiency.

The report's specific recommendations fall into three categories:

1. Maintain the entitlement status of current federal food assistance programs which are designed to respond to fluctuations in the economy. (e.g. the Food Stamp program, the National School Lunch and Breakfast programs, the Summer Food Service Program).
2. Expand access to, enhance and improve programs that are already in place. Our recommendations clearly outline improvements that can be made in the delivery of programs and methods of expanding access to crucial programs.
3. Form community partnerships to develop greater measures of food security for low-income families. Community involvement has proven to be one of the most effective means of improving food and nutrition programs.

These recommendations come at a time when the structure of food programs is being debated nationally. Specifically, there are proposals to put federal nutrition programs into block grants giving states the ability to design and implement programs which are most suitable to their needs. While this concept may allow greater flexibility to states, it would fundamentally change important characteristics of these programs. As a result, some programs would lose their entitlement status, grants to states would not grow to meet increased need in times of economic woes, and federal funding for food assistance programs in Texas could be reduced by 30 percent. These current recommendations for block granting threaten the food security of literally thousands of Texas families and would undermine the success of existing food assistance. Therefore, we call upon Congress to reject proposals which would exacerbate hunger among Texas children.

Recommendations to Lawmakers, Communities and Individuals

Knowing that all Texans will have different roles in the eradication of hunger in Texas, this report directs its recommendations towards lawmakers, communities and individual Texans.

- It calls upon lawmakers to make the elimination of childhood hunger a priority.
- It encourages communities to unite in addressing hunger needs through public and private partnerships.
- It provides concrete steps for individuals to participate in ensuring food security for all.

Statement on the Link Between Nutrition and Cognitive Development in Children, Tufts University School of Nutrition - Center on Hunger, Poverty and Nutrition Policy, 1993.

INTRODUCTION

Every day, a large number of Texas parents must decide between buying groceries and paying rent, between feeding their children and heating their homes, between sending their children to school after a good breakfast or sending them to school in shoes. Every day, these parents must make decisions about allocating the limited financial resources at their command. And every day, children go hungry in Texas.

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However, for thousands of low-income families across this state — resourceful families with jobs, homes, and a willingness to work to better their children's lives — the struggle with hunger is a daily occurrence. These are the invisible victims of hunger — the families and children who are deprived of their most basic need.

In order to end hunger, we must first understand it. To focus our efforts on resolving the problem, we must first know something about the specifics — the families who experience it, and their efforts to cope with it. In order to judge the effectiveness of current food assistance programs, we must understand how they are being utilized by low-income families. We must know what barriers prevent families from taking advantage of anti-hunger assistance. With this knowledge, we can understand the extent and severity of hunger and target our response effectively.

The goal of the Texas Childhood Hunger Identification Project (Texas CHIP) is to provide this knowledge and understanding. This research project is the most comprehensive study of childhood hunger ever undertaken in this state. This report summarizes the findings of the Texas CHIP. It is clear from this study that hunger is no longer an issue as far removed as Third World images of starvation. Indeed, the Texas CHIP findings show us hunger is in every community, as close as our own neighborhood and in families we see every day. We believe this information is a call to action for us all and a beginning of the end of childhood hunger in our state and in this country.

THE COMMUNITY CHILDHOOD HUNGER IDENTIFICATION PROJECT

The national Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project (CCHIP)[1] was developed following reports in the early 1980's of an increasing demand for emergency foods by families. An economic downturn, coupled with cuts in federal food assistance and income security programs, led to a marked rise in the number of families relying on soup kitchens and food pantries for their most basic survival needs. Reports of this increased demand on what were meant to be "emergency" programs were dismissed by many policy makers as anecdotal. The 1984 Presidential Task Force on Food Assistance concluded that it could not "report definitive evidence on the extent of hunger" because an acceptable measure had not yet been developed."

> *The Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project defines hunger as a lack of food resources due to insufficient economic, family, or community resources*

The CCHIP survey was developed in response to the needs of policy makers and service providers for reliable, statistically valid evidence about hunger. The CCHIP was designed to assess food insufficiency and inadequate food resources in an effort to document the prevalence of hunger among poor families in the United States, and to describe the characteristics that make these families vulnerable to this problem.

The Texas CHIP is part of this national effort. The research is sponsored nationally by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), a national research, education and advocacy organization located in Washington D.C. The Texas CHIP is one of eleven surveys being conducted in ten states across the country.

THE TEXAS CHILDHOOD HUNGER IDENTIFICATION PROJECT

In recent years, there has been limited state-level attention to the issues of childhood hunger and undernutrition in Texas. While childhood poverty was increasing statewide throughout the last decade, few initiatives were offered to address the growing needs of hungry children and their families. Proponents of a more active state response to these issues found themselves curiously unable to provide data to show why an expansion of food and nutrition assistance should be undertaken to curb the growing numbers of hungry children. It was becoming clear that a lack of understanding existed about the specifics of childhood hunger and the programs aimed at addressing this problem.

The lack of valid data about the extent and severity of hunger in Texas left the Center for Public Policy Priorities and others unable to evaluate the effectiveness of anti-hunger programs or their need. During this time, the Food Research and Action Center had released their first Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project report on childhood hunger in America and was beginning a second round of CCHIP surveys in states around the country. Knowing of the rigor and validity of this initial study, the Center chose to work with FRAC to undertake the Texas Childhood Hunger Identification Project (Texas CHIP), and in April of 1992, the Center launched this project.

The Texas CHIP is the most comprehensive childhood hunger survey ever conducted in Texas. Targeting low-income families with children under the age of 12 and with household incomes at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty guidelines ($2,151 per month for a family of four), Texas CHIP provides a profile of hungry families in Texas and scientifically sound data concerning the prevalence of hunger among this population. Because the family income level targeted in the study also includes the eligibility requirements for most public food and nutrition programs, the research also provides a profile of access, utilization and common barriers to current programs.

METHODOLOGY

The Texas CHIP used the nationally tested CCHIP survey instrument which includes two phases of data collection: Enumeration and Interviewing.

Working with demographers from the University of Texas, the national CCHIP scientists selected a site which spanned a triangle of 27 counties from Uvalde to Dallas to Beaumont. This site was chosen because it contains rural and urban areas, spans from western to eastern Texas and is representative of both the ethnic diversity and the income distribution of Texas. This site was chosen as a sentinel site, providing a benchmark against which other, poorer areas of the state such as the Rio Grande Valley, far East and far West Texas could be compared. The site was chosen to be reflective of poverty in Texas as a whole, rather than to focus on areas of more concentrated poverty where hunger was more readily apparent.

During the first phase of data collection, Enumeration, the national CCHIP scientists, using 1990 census data, selected 54 census block groups from within this multi-county site. Every dwelling within the block groups was then listed, some 21,237 households. After the listing was completed, the Texas CHIP staff screened households door-to-door for eligibility in the survey. To be eligible in the survey, households had to have incomes at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty guidelines, and at least one child under the age of twelve at the time of the interview.

A random sample of 1,005 households — from the 3,376 eligible households — was selected to be interviewed by Texas CHIP staff members. Texas CHIP staff interviewed 715 of these families. These interviews, roughly one and one-half hours long, consisted of 171 questions. Some questions were aimed at determining a family's experience with hunger, while concerned income allocation, food frequency, risk of homelessness and participation in food assistance programs.

In order to maintain the integrity of the study, the field site coordinator in each region personally verified every one of the questionnaires by contacting the respondent, either by telephone or in person, and asking several questions designed to confirm that the interview was conducted properly and to fill in any missing information.

It is important to note the Texas CHIP measures hunger conservatively. It does not include homeless families or families with incomes above 185 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. Although not included in the study, these families may also be hungry or at risk of hunger.

Poverty Rates at the Time of Interviews

Family Size	100% of Poverty	185% of Poverty
2	$ 9,190	$17,002
3	11,570	21,405
4	13,950	25,808
5	16,330	30,211
6	18,710	34,614
additional member	+2,380	+4,403

THE EIGHT CORE QUESTIONS OF THE TEXAS CHILDHOOD HUNGER IDENTIFICATION PROJECT

The following questions were asked during the Texas CHIP Interview. These questions were used to determine hunger in interviewed families. Families were considered hungry if they answered yes to five or more of these questions, and at-risk of hunger if they answered yes to one to four of the questions.

Thinking about the past 12 months:

- *Did your household ever run out of money to buy food to make a meal?*
- *Did you or adult members of your household ever eat less than you felt you should because there was not enough money for food?*
- *Did you or adult members of your household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there was not enough money for food?*
- *Did your children ever eat less than you felt they should because there was not enough money to buy food?*
- *Did you ever cut the size of your children's meals or did they ever skip meals because there was not enough money for food?*
- *Did your children ever say they were hungry because there was not enough food in the house?*
- *Did you ever rely on a limited number of foods to feed members of your household because you were running out of money for food?*
- *Did your children ever go to bed hungry because there was not enough money to buy food?*

WHO RESPONDED

The Texas CHIP interviewed 715 families, all of whom had children under the age of 12 and whose household incomes were at or below 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. A surprising number of the Texas CHIP families fall inside of the "traditional" family definition. It is also interesting to note that the majority of Texas CHIP families did not reflect the stereotypical "welfare family" image often assigned to low-income families. The following are profiles of the participants in the Texas CHIP study.

Income:

The majority of Texas CHIP families (63.8%) had a household income of less than 100 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. At the time of the interview, a family of four was considered poor if the household income fell below $13, 952.

Family Size and Make-up

Almost half (49.4%) of the respondent families were two parent families. Only 27.6 percent were single female headed households. Most of the Texas CHIP parents (59.4%) were not teenagers when their first child was born. The families were smaller and had fewer children than stereotypes would have it:

- The average household size was 4.8 people.
- The average number of children per household was 2.7.

Children:

A majority of the families interviewed (81.3%) had school age children, with another 62.4 percent had children under the age of five.

Race/Ethnicity

Of the Texas CHIP families 44.6 percent were Hispanic, 30.6 percent were Black ,20.6 percent were White, and 4.2 percent were of other races.

Urban vs. Rural:

50.5 percent of all Texas CHIP respondents lived in urban settings.

Overall, urban households were significantly more likely to have non-white members (89.2%) than rural households (69.5%). A greater proportion of the Hispanic households (59.9%) were in urban areas, while a greater proportion of White households (73.5%) were in rural areas.

Education:

50 percent of respondents had either graduated from High School, or completed their Graduate Equivalency Exam (GED)

Employment status:

73.8 percent of all Texas CHIP families received household income from gross salaries

- Average hourly wage of respondent: $5.97 per hour
- Average hourly wage of contributing adults is $7.08 per hour.
- The average monthly gross income was $1082.67. Adding in the value of Food stamps and WIC benefits, the household income averaged $1247.54

Expenditures:

Food:

- Total amount spent on food including food stamps and WIC was $352.65 on average.
- $74.49 was spent per person monthly (including food stamps and WIC).
- $0.82 was spent (including food stamps and WIC) per person per meal on average.
- The percentage of gross income spent on food including food stamps and WIC was 27.8 percent

Housing:

- 66.9 percent of Texas CHIP families rented their dwelling.
- Monthly shelter costs (rent or mortgage, and utilities) averaged $364.59
- On average, families spent 31.0 percent of their income on shelter.
- Only 10.4 percent of CHIP families lived in public housing.
- 12.9 percent of CHIP families received rent subsidies

Housing and Risk of Homelessness

The average surveyed family had moved 2.4 times in the past 5 years.

- 56.4 percent lived in single family dwellings
- 21.5 percent had shared living quarters in the past twelve months. When they shared living quarters, they shared them for an average of 6.4 months.
- 17.1 percent had moved most recently because of economic constraints.
- 33.2 percent had made their most recent move because of improved housing
- 10.5 percent had been homeless as adults at some point. More than eighty percent (83.3%) of those adults had been homeless since the birth of their first child.

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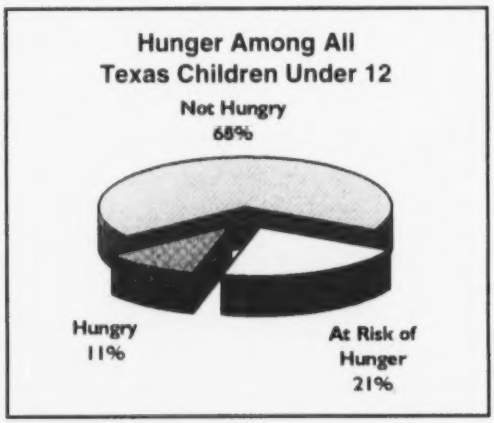
[i] Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project — A survey of Childhood Hunger in the United States. Food Research and Action Center, 1991.

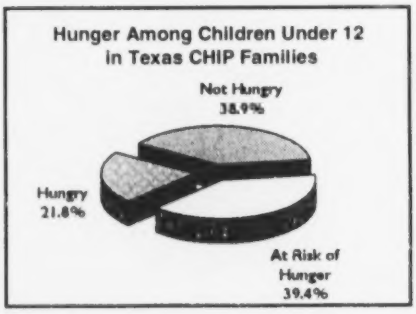
[ii] President's Task Force on Food Assistance, 1984.

THE FINDINGS

#1
ONE IN NINE CHILDREN UNDER 12 ARE HUNGRY IN TEXAS

Perhaps the most alarming finding of all is the prevalence of hunger among children under twelve in Texas. Data gathered from the Texas CHIP site indicate that one in every nine Texas children under twelve suffers from hunger. This translates to 383,988 children — more than all the children in El Paso, Beaumont and Brownsville combined. When including children who might be at risk of hunger, the numbers are an even more astounding 1.1 million children or 1 in 3 Texas children.





In looking at low-income families the statistics are equally dramatic. For example, of children in low-income families surveyed by the Texas CHIP, 21.8 percent were hungry and 39.4 percent were at risk of hunger. This data translates into 117,600 hungry children and an additional 212,819 children at risk of hunger in the study site.

What Effect Does Hunger Have on Children?

We know that hunger affects children in every way — cognitively, physically and emotionally. A Tufts University study on the effects of hunger on children shows that undernutrition, combined with the environmental factors associated with poverty, can permanently retard physical growth, brain development, and cognitive functioning[i]. Whereas previous research has shown the link between severe malnutrition and impaired intellectual development of children, (i.e., in Third World countries experiencing famine), the Tufts University report concludes that even moderate undernutrition can have lasting negative effects on a child's development.

The Tufts report states that the primary factor associated with nutritional status in this country is poverty, a connection indicated by the results of the Texas CHIP. "Poor housing, inadequate health care, unemployment and weakened family and community support systems all interact with undernutrition to impede a child's healthy development."[ii] Because of the rapid increase in the number of children living in poverty in the US, more children than ever may be undernourished. Given the established link between poverty, undernutrition and subsequent impaired mental development of children, it is clear that America is facing a crisis of dangerous proportions.

> *"You can always tell the week before payday because the kids fight more when there's not enough food."*
> *Texas CHIP Respondent*

Hunger can impair a child's ability to learn, and also negatively affects a child's school attendance. Compared to well-fed children, hungry children are more likely to be apathetic and disinterested in their environment and have difficulty concentrating. Long term hunger increases the risk of chronic undernutrition and also contributes to low birth weights in infants, reduced rate of growth in children, and low resistance to infection. In addition to health problems, chronic hunger also contributes to problems with learning and interacting with people. These facts are borne out by Texas CHIP respondents.

Overall, children from hungry households experienced nearly twice the number of health problems of non-hungry households.

- Approximately 15.5 percent of hungry families reported that their children had suffered from fatigue in the last six months as did 8.7 percent of at risk families. Only 4.5 percent of all families that were non-hungry reported child fatigue.
- More than 20.5 percent of hungry families reported irritability in their children, as did 17.2 percent of at risk families. Only 5.5 percent of non-hungry families reported irritability in the past six months.
- Children from hungry families were almost three times more likely than non-hungry households to report frequent headaches, with 14.5 percent responding yes. 8.7 percent of at-risk families reported frequent headaches as compared to 5.0 percent of non-hungry families.
- Children from hungry families were more likely to report frequent ear infections (23.5%) as did the at-risk families (17.4%), while 13.6 percent of non-hungry families reported frequent ear infections.

Percent of Texas CHIP Children Citing Health Problems

Health Problem	Hungry	Non-Hungry
Fatigue	15.1%	4.5%
Increased Irritability	20.5%	5.5%
Frequent Headaches	14.5%	5.0%
Frequent Ear Infections	23.5%	13.6%
Inability to Concentrate	12.8%	3.0%

Table 2

- 12.8 percent of hungry families reported that their children had had an inability to concentrate in the past six months as compared to 3.0 percent of non-hungry households.

This increased incidence of illness has serious repercussions for school attendance and learning. For each spell of illness, hungry children missed an average of 1.5 days of school.

#2
Hungry Families Are Working But Don't Make Enough Money to Feed Their Children

One of the most disquieting findings of the Texas CHIP is the number of hungry families who can be classified as the "working poor." In Texas, having a job is no guarantee against hunger.

There is an enormous amount of economic pressure on low-income families in today's society. Families must sharpen their survival skills just to juggle all the complex financial, emotional and social pressures. Poor families often lack the resources to provide for their children's most basic needs due to shortages of both money and time. For many, basic survival is a full-time job.

With fixed costs such as housing, utilities, transportation, etc., families are left with little discretionary income with which to pay for food. These families are very often left with no other choice but to serve less food to their families, leaving them at risk of hunger and undernutrition.

Hunger and Poverty

In 1994, the US Conference of Mayors surveyed thirty major cities whose mayors are members of its Task Force on Hunger and Homelessness in order to assess the status of hunger and homelessness in urban America.[iii] The officials responding to the survey identified unemployment, other employment related problems, poverty or the lack of income, the high cost of living and the low benefit levels in public assistance programs as the main factors contributing to hunger.

> *Fully 74.5 percent of the hungry households have incomes under 100 percent of poverty and of those households at risk of hunger, 62.1 percent had incomes lower than the poverty level.*

Fully 70.1 percent of hungry Texas CHIP families are "working poor." These are families that had at least one member employed, and still had inadequate resources to meet all their family's food and nutrition needs. On average, Texas CHIP respondents from hungry families worked 34.3 hours per week at an average wage of $6.34 per hour. Seventy percent of households interviewed had an additional adult — beside the respondent — who contributed to the support and care of the children, and these adults in hungry households worked an average of 37.9 hours per week for an average wage of $7.06 per hour.(See Table 1)

The likelihood of experiencing hunger or the risk of hunger is related to income. The prevalence of hunger among Texas CHIP families increases as their levels of income decrease. The data show poverty as a strong indicator of whether or not families will be able to adequately feed their children. The Texas CHIP findings reveal the prevalence of hunger increases the further household income falls below the poverty level.

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Income of Hungry Families	
Average monthly income	$986.57
Average income per capita	$208.46
Percent of Hungry Families who had no income for a period of time during the last year	32.3%
Average income of a Hungry Family as a percent of the federal poverty guidelines	73.7%

Table 1

- The average monthly income was less for hungry households ($986.57) than non-hungry households ($1172.76).
- The average income per capita was less in hungry households ($208.46) than in non-hungry families ($261.63).
- Hungry households were more likely to have had a period of time in the past twelve months when the household had no income (32.3%) than non-hungry households (7.0%).
- Hungry households were significantly more likely to have income at or below 100 percent of the federal poverty guidelines (74.5%) than non-hungry households (57.6%).
- The income of hungry families was at a lower percentage of the federal poverty level (74.5%) than non-hungry households (90.2%).

Coping with Hunger

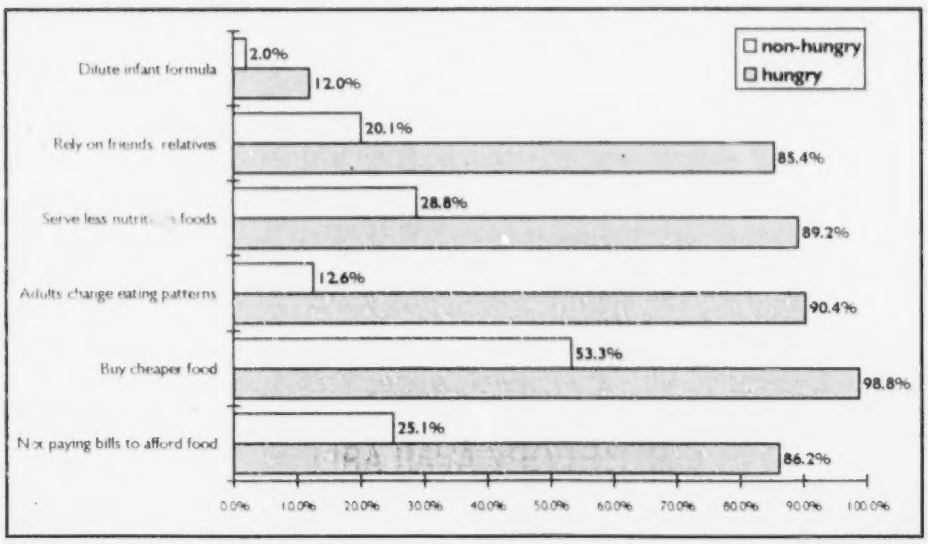
Families confronted with hungry children, and limited finances to deal with the problem, rely on an array of coping techniques to contend with hunger. Families are resourceful in meeting this challenge in two main ways: 1) Reliance strategies which blend a support network with food stretching tactics, and 2) Participation in food assistance programs.

Hungry Texas CHIP families were more likely to report that the resources they have for food are inadequate (82.0%) than non-hungry households (33.7%).

Reliance Strategies

Faced with food shortages, respondents used a variety of coping techniques.

Hungry families were more likely to rely on food-stretching tactics (99.4%) than non-hungry families (58.8%). Hungry families used nearly 4 times as many food stretching tactics as non-hungry households. In an effort to stretch food money, hungry families relied upon the following strategies:



A network of support is important in a family's fight against hunger.

> *"Before we were able to get Food Stamps, friends helped us eat. We never had to sleep in the car either, but if it weren't for friends we might have done that, too. I'm real lucky to have good friends."*
>
> *Texas CHIP Respondent*

Hungry households reported having a smaller support network (including friends and relatives) to turn to during times of personal or economic stress than respondents from non-hungry households. They also reported less access to professional or organizational assistance. However, hungry households used six times as many strategies involving friends and relatives to cope with food shortage problems than non-hungry households. Hungry households were more likely to rely on friends and relatives for food or money for food (85.4%) than non hungry families (20.1%).

Reliance on Friends and Relatives	Hungry	Non-hungry
Borrowed money	77.1 %	14.6 %
Got food from friend/ relative	61.7 %	10.0 %
Sent children to eat at friend/relative's house	33.7 %	3.0 %

Texas CHIP Families Want to Work

> *Given the choice, almost 60 percent of hungry Texas CHIP families chose employment and higher wages as the key to feeding their families.*

In their efforts to locate the resources that would prevent them from going hungry, many families stated all they needed was a sufficient income on which to live at a sustaining level. When asked what would provide this, the responses were directly linked to employment and food assistance as well as affordable living expenses.

When asked what the number one factor would be that would help feed their family better, respondents from hungry families identified the following:	
Percent response	**Identified number one factor**
31.1 %	• employment
27.5 %	• higher wages
8.4 %	• increased food stamps
8.4 %	• better access to cheaper food
7.8 %	• increased welfare
7.8 %	• more education and training
2.4 %	• affordable housing
2.4 %	• improved English
1.2 %	• increased medical insurance
.6 %	• affordable child care
0.0 %	• budgeting information
0.0 %	• assistance in solving domestic or personal problems
2.4 %	• other

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#3

Food Assistance Programs Provide an Important Defense Against Hunger for Low-Income Families

One positive and successful way in which Americans have tried to stem the tide of childhood hunger in this country is through the implementation of food and nutrition programs designed to help families feed their children. These programs not only address immediate hunger needs, but are important temporary supports as families work toward self-sufficiency.

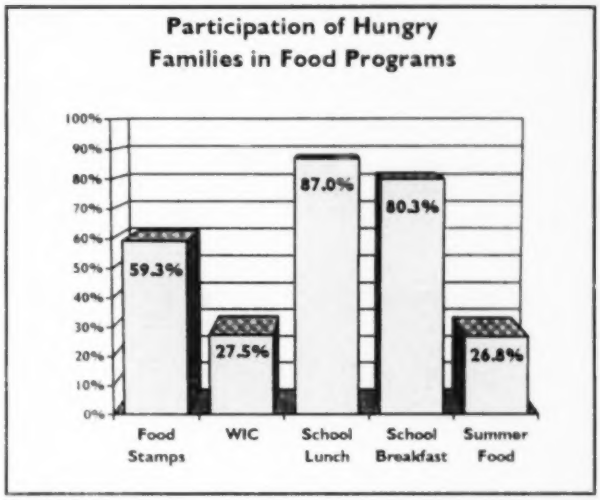


Figure 2

Families cannot fight hunger alone. Curbing the incidence of hunger in this country will take both political and economic will. Initiatives to build self-sufficiency must be combined with continued support for food and nutrition assistance if we are to see an end to hunger and its enormous societal costs.

Texas CHIP families participate in all the major federally funded food programs: Food Stamps, WIC, School Lunch, School Breakfast and Summer Food. Hungry families, in particular, rely upon these programs to feed their families. (See Figure 2) However, many hungry families who are eligible to receive program benefits are not currently participating in those programs. Most notably, 32.3 percent of hungry families are eligible for food stamps and not receiving them and 35.9 percent of hungry families with children under age 5 are eligible — both categorically and by income — for WIC and not receiving WIC benefits. The main reason for hungry families not participating in food and nutrition programs was the mistaken belief that they were not eligible.

In assessing the respondent's utilization of food assistance, the Texas CHIP focused on programs whose primary recipients are children. There are other governmental food assistance programs — and private efforts — that help segments of the populace which were not included in the survey.

Food Stamps

Food Stamps provide an important part of low-income families' food budget. Over sixty percent (61.7%) of all families in the Texas CHIP survey had received food stamps in the past twelve months.

The Food Stamp Program is the cornerstone of food assistance programs, and next to employment, is often a family's first defense against hunger. The program issues monthly allotments of coupons which are redeemable at retail food stores. Eligibility and allotments are based on household size and income, assets, housing costs, work requirements and other factors. The benefit level is based on the Thrifty Food Plan, a hypothetical market basket of foods for a nutritious diet, the cost of which is derived from a survey of actual food prices.

The federal government shares the costs with the state for operating the food stamp program, such as administrative expenses (including certification of households, issuance of stamps, data processing and anti-fraud activities), outreach to potential recipients, and state employment and training programs for recipients. However, the

On a monthly basis, hungry households received $53.44 per capita from food stamps while non-hungry households received $63.86.

federal government alone bears the entire cost of the actual food coupons. The food stamp program is also an important economic stabilizer. Because it is an entitlement program — those who meet the income and resource criteria are automatically eligible — the food stamp program is able to respond to economic cycles. During economic recessions, food stamps provide a stabilizing effect to families and communities suffering from unemployment and reduced income and economic activity.

Food Stamp participation rates are highest among hungry families.

Percent of Texas CHIP Families Receiving Food Stamps	
All Texas CHIP families	54.1 %
Hungry families	59.3 %
Families at risk of hunger	55.9 %
Families who are not hungry	46.2 %

Food stamp benefits do not last the entire month, especially for hungry families.

- Only 10.0 percent of hungry families said that they could feed their family for an entire month with their food stamps as compared with 52.7 percent of non-hungry families.
- On average, hungry families could feed their families only 2.8 weeks on their food stamp allotment, as compared to 3.3 weeks for non-hungry households. Ninety percent (90.0%) of hungry families claimed that their benefits did not last the entire month compared to 47.3 percent of non-hungry families.
- 68.3 percent of all Texas CHIP families combined their own income with food stamps in order to make them last the entire month. On average in the twenty seven county area, people added $101.25 to their food stamp dollars.

Lack of information about eligibility is a key reason for not applying for food stamps.

Of Those Families Who Had Not Applied for Food Stamps	
Reasons for Not Applying	**% Citing this Reason**
Thought they were ineligible	68.6 %
Embarrassed to use food stamps	30.3 %
Pride or No Need	20.0 %
No transportation to food stamp office	6.7 %
Unable to complete paperwork	4.2 %

- Hungry families were more likely to have applied for food stamps (91.8%) than non-hungry families (77.3%).
- 78.6 percent of hungry families who were not *currently* receiving food stamps thought their family was not eligible.
- Of the families who haven't applied for food stamps because they did not think they were eligible, 13.6 percent were hungry and 54.3 were at risk of hunger.
- Hungry families were more likely to be receiving food stamps currently (59.3%) than non-hungry (46.2%). In addition, 32.3 percent of the hungry households were income eligible for food stamps but not receiving them.
- Of the families who do not receive food stamps because they feel they no longer need them, 12.2 percent are hungry and 58.5 percent are at risk of hunger.

Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)

> *"WIC helped a lot when the kids were little, but we lost that when they got older. The oldest gets school meals this year but the other two are in-between."*
>
> *Texas CHIP Respondent*

The Women, Infants and Children's Supplemental Food Program (WIC) program is designed to improve the health of pregnant, breast feeding and postpartum women, and infants and children up to 5 years old, by providing supplemental foods, nutrition education, and access to health services. Eligibility is determined by income and nutritional risk as determined by a health professional. Participants receive vouchers that can be redeemed at retail food stores for specified foods that research has shown are frequently lacking in the diet of low-income mothers and children.

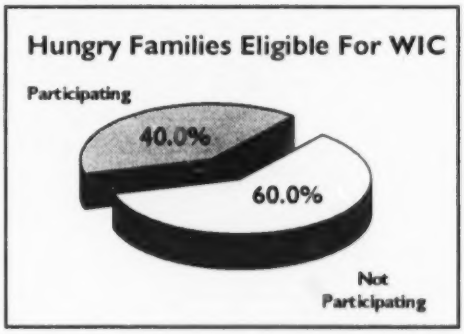
The program has been shown to be effective in improving the health of pregnant women, new mothers and their infants. A recent study showed that women who participated in the program during their pregnancies incurred lower Medicaid costs for themselves and their babies than did women who did not participate. According to a 1992 report by the US General Accounting Office (GAO)[iv] for every dollar spent in prenatal WIC benefits, $2.78 is saved by the state of Texas on Medicaid expenses during the first year of life.

In Texas, the program reaches approximately 64 percent of the eligible population. In FY 1992, $316 million were allocated for the Texas WIC program. Although the majority of the funding is federal dollars, $3.3 million comes from state revenues.

WIC is an important defense against hunger and malnutrition.

More than ninety percent (92.2%) of all CHIP families had heard of the WIC program and 66.5 percent had applied to WIC at some point.

Among families with children between the ages of one and five years, only 40.0% of hungry families were participating in the WIC program. 60.0 percent were eligible but not participating.



The leading reason cited by families who have not applied for WIC is that they think they are ineligible.

Stated Reasons for Not Applying	% Citing this Reason
Thought they were ineligible	59.7 %
Thought there was no need or pride	17.2 %
Did not know how or where	14.4 %
No transportation	5.5 %
Heard there was a waiting list	1.7 %
Other	18.9 %

Although all families in the Texas CHIP study were income eligible for WIC, 12.5 percent of those who were currently not receiving WIC benefits were not receiving benefits because they thought their income was too high.

Stated Reasons for Not Receiving Benefits Currently	% Citing this Reason
Their children were too old	50.9 %
Did not need WIC services	15.9 %
Believed their income was too high	12.5 %
No transportation to clinic	8.3 %
There was a waiting list	1.1 %
Other	24.9 %

School-Based Nutrition Programs

There are two major school-based nutrition programs in Texas: the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program. These programs are critical to meeting the daily nutritional needs of low-income children. When the National School Lunch Program was created it was viewed as a "measure of national security, to safeguard the health and well-being of the nation's children."[v] The establishment of the School Breakfast program carried that vision further knowing that poor school children needed a healthy nutritious meal to begin their school day successfully.

The National School Lunch Program was originally established in 1946 through the National School Lunch Act. Some twenty years later the School Breakfast Program was created as a pilot program to provide meals to children in "poor areas and areas where children had to travel a great distance to school."[vi] In 1975, amendments to the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 (PL 89-642) permanently authorized this program. Included in this legislation was a statement of Congressional intent that the program "be made available in all schools where it is needed to provide adequate nutrition for children in attendance."[vii]

Both programs are entitlement programs providing federal funds to all schools that apply and meet the program's eligibility criteria. All public and non-profit private schools (regardless of tuition) and all residential child care institutions (RCCIs) can participate in these programs. In those participating institutions, breakfast and lunch are available to all students. Schools operating a program are required to inform households of the availability of the program and to provide applications for free and reduced-price meals upon request. Parents must generally apply to the school in order for their children to receive a free or reduced-price breakfast. The same application covers both lunch and breakfast.

Household income is used to determine whether a child will pay a substantial part of the cost for their breakfast or will receive a reduced-price or free meal. To receive a free meal, household income must fall below 130 percent of the poverty level, and for reduced-price meals, it must be between 185 and 130 percent of poverty.

National School Lunch Program

In Texas, 1,370,621 low-income children receive free or reduced-priced school lunches daily. Another 600,000 children eat meals in the National School Lunch Program on a daily basis, paying the full price for their meals. With two million Texas children eating in the National School Lunch Program, essentially 57 percent of the 3.5 million Texas school children participate in this program.

The well-established nature of the National School Lunch Program probably accounts for the fact that 97.9 percent of Texas CHIP families had heard of it. Just over eighty-six percent (86.2%) of those Texas CHIP families that were identified as hungry had children who participated in the National School Lunch Program. The importance of the program as a defense against hunger is illustrated by the fact that

only 4.0 percent of eligible hungry families in the Texas CHIP study were not participating in the School Lunch Program.

School Breakfast

> *"The kids always get a good lunch at school, but a lot of times, they miss breakfast because the bus gets there too late."*
>
> *Texas CHIP Respondent*

Although almost 1.4 million Texas low-income school children eat in the National School Lunch Program on a daily basis, fewer than half — 615,154 — of those students eat in the School Breakfast program. The School Breakfast Program has been associated with significantly improved standardized achievement test scores and tardiness rates.[viii] Additionally, 24.4 percent of all Texas CHIP families were eligible, but not participating in the program. Potentially, many of the low-income children not eating in the School Breakfast program are eating at home. However, some research suggests that inadequacies in the delivery of the School Breakfast program influence whether or not low-income children participate.[ix] Texas CHIP findings indicate that 36.0 percent of the children were not participating in the breakfast program because they did not arrive at school on time, and almost one quarter (22.6 percent) because the children did not like the food.

Among the Texas CHIP respondents 96.2 percent had heard of the School Breakfast program. More than eighty percent (80.3%) of hungry families and 70.4 percent of at-risk families were participating in the program.

Texas ranks fourth in the country in the percent of schools who participate in both the lunch and breakfast programs and therefore, the state does not face a problem of low participation rates among schools. Ninety-six percent of Texas schools provide both lunch and breakfast programs. Therefore, unlike many states, Texas does not have to focus its efforts on increasing the number of schools participating in the School Breakfast Program, but rather upon increasing access and the appeal of food on a school-by-school basis.

Non-Participation in the School Breakfast Program

Stated Reasons for Not Participating	% Citing this Reason
Their children arrived too late at school	36.0%
Their children don't like the food	22.6%
Their children were embarrassed	14.7%
They were unaware of their eligibility in the program	13.7%
Kindergarten schedule	7.4%
School doesn't sponsor the program	4.2%
Program costs too much	3.7%
Other reasons	20.5%

Summer Food Service Program

The Summer Food Service Program was created by Congress in 1968 as an entitlement program designed to provide nutritious meals to children from disadvantaged areas when school is closed. The Summer Food Program is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), which provides funding for state agencies to operate the Summer Food Service Program at the state level and to reimburse eligible sponsors for meals served to children at feeding sites. Eligible feeding sites are either "open sites", those *located* in areas where 50 percent or more of the children live in families with incomes of less than 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines, or "enrolled sites", those in which 50 percent of the children *attending* are from families with incomes under 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

Although Texas has been a national leader in the expansion of the Summer Food Service Program, many low-income Texas communities still remain unserved, and children in those communities may go hungry in the summer months. Only 31.5 percent of all Texas CHIP families had ever heard of the Summer Food Services Program and only 27.0 percent of hungry families were participating. The limited number and accessibility of feeding sites continues to hinder greater participation in the Summer Food Service Program.

Of Those Currently Not Participating in Summer Food Service Program	
Reasons for Not Participating	**% Citing this Reason**
No program in their area	35.1 %
Difficulty in getting to the program	19.7 %
Children did not want to go	10.6 %
Did not think they were eligible	5.6 %
Their children don't like the food	3.3 %
Program costs too much	1.1%
Other reason	30.6 %

Emergency Food Programs

Emergency Food providers such as food banks, emergency shelters, and food pantries in Texas are a private response to the state's hunger problem. A network of food banks solicits food donations from food manufacturers all over Texas and the rest of the country. Food banks store the donated products, and supply local food pantries, direct service providers, emergency shelters, and soup kitchens with food to serve the needy. In this past year, millions of pounds of food were distributed to hungry Texans across the state through the emergency food network.

Emergency food programs were never purposefully meant to be a part of the nation's comprehensive plan to target hunger. They were designed to help families in crisis, and have become part of a community infrastructure of food assistance when the primary state and federal food programs fall short of meeting the needs of the hungry.

> *"After the house burned down we needed food, but no one gave us any food when we really needed it — just the church once."*
> *Texas CHIP Respondent*

The Texas CHIP findings show that hungry families were more likely to rely on emergency food programs (37.7%) than non-hungry households (7.5%).

- Hungry households were more likely to get food from a food pantry (28.7%) as non-hungry families (6.5%).
- Hungry families were more likely to get food from a soup kitchen (19.5%) than non-hungry households (2.0%).

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[i] Statement on the Link Between Nutrition and Cognitive Development in Children, Tufts University School of Nutrition - Center on Hunger, Poverty and Nutrition Policy, 1993.

[ii] IBID.

[iii] A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in American Cities: 1994, The United States Conference of Mayors, 1994.

[iv] Early Intervention - Federal Investments Like WIC Can Produce Savings. US General Accounting Office. April 1992.

[v] Fact Sheets on the Federal Food Assistance Programs, Food Research and Action Center, May 1993.

[vi] IBID.

[vii] IBID.

[viii] School Breakfast and School Performance. Meyers, et al. American Journal of Diseases of Children, October, 1989.

[ix] Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project — A Survey of Childhood Hunger in the United States. Food Research and Action Center, 1991.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

We know children are hungry in Texas and hungry families in Texas are working and trying to earn wages adequate enough to feed their children. We also know the problem would be much worse if federal food and nutrition programs were not in place to assist families in feeding their children.

This information should spur Texas lawmakers, Texas communities and individual Texans to action. Knowing the extent of the problem, the barriers identified by families in their efforts to feed their children, and the parents' desire to work, we believe concrete steps can be taken to begin the end of childhood hunger in Texas.

Family Economic Security: The Real Solution

The first step in ending childhood hunger in Texas is achieving economic security for all families. The evidence shows adequate incomes could alleviate hunger. Therefore, our first recommendation is to ensure the economic security of families. This is a long-term goal which includes intensive job training, a basic support system emphasizing child care, transportation and other support services necessary for working parents to continue working, and finally, adequate wages to lift families out of poverty.

Improving Current Food and Nutrition Programs: The Interim Steps

Short of building family economic security, we believe there are many intermediate steps that need to be taken to positively affect childhood hunger. Texas CHIP data show many families turn to federal food and nutrition assistance programs when their incomes prove insufficient in feeding their children. In addition, the data illustrate many, despite their need, are unable to access these programs or are ill-informed about how they work.

This report makes recommendations for improving food and nutrition assistance programs to ensure families in need have a network of services to address their immediate and longer term food needs while they work toward self-sufficiency.

The report's specific recommendations fall into three categories:

1. Maintain the entitlement status of current federal food assistance programs which are designed to respond to fluctuations in the economy. (e.g. the Food Stamp program, the National School Lunch and Breakfast programs, the Summer Food Service Program).
2. Expand access to, enhance and improve programs that are already in place. Our recommendations clearly outline improvements that can be made in the delivery of programs and methods of expanding access to crucial programs.

3. Form community partnerships to develop greater measures of food security for low-income families. Community involvement has proven to be one of the most effective means of providing food security for all families.

These recommendations come at a time when the structure of food programs is being debated nationally. There are proposals to put federal nutrition programs into block grants giving states the ability to design and implement programs which are most suitable to their needs. While this concept may allow greater flexibility to states, it would fundamentally change important characteristics of these programs. Some programs would lose their entitlement status, resulting in the exclusion of hungry and nutritionally at risk low-income families from the programs. Additionally, in times of economic downturns, grant amounts would not be increased, leaving states without a reliable means of providing needed food assistance in times of crisis. In fact, a recent report by the U.S. Department of Agriculture indicates block granting would reduce federal funding for food assistance programs in Texas by 30%. At this same time, the state is not prepared to compensate for this loss in federal funding.

Current recommendations for block granting threaten the food security of literally thousands of Texas families and would undermine the success of existing food assistance. Therefore, we call upon Congress to reject proposals which would exacerbate hunger among Texas children.

Recommendations to Lawmakers, Communities and Individuals

Knowing that all Texans will have different roles in the eradication of hunger in Texas, this report directs its recommendations towards lawmakers, communities and individual Texans.

- It calls upon lawmakers to make the elimination of childhood hunger a priority.
- It encourages communities to unite in addressing hunger needs through public and private partnerships.
- It provides concrete steps for individuals to participate in ensuring food security for all.

Family Economic Security: The Real Solution

Overwhelmingly, Texas CHIP data show hunger is connected to poverty. Families who are hungry are those with fewer economic resources. It illustrates that hungry families have greater economic security concerns than families who were not hungry. Hungry families have less income than their non-hungry counterparts and are more likely to have periods of the year where they have no income. When asked to identify the number one way that they could better feed their families, the survey respondents list higher wages and more stable employment as their primary needs.

Therefore, the primary recommendation of this report is to enhance the economic security of hungry families. Although we acknowledge the long-term nature of this recommendation, we firmly believe that adequate wages and a social services structure that supports employment are the keys to ending hunger in Texas.

- *First and foremost Texas must work to increase the number of jobs that provide wages and benefits at a level that can keep families out of poverty and off of public benefits.* As the Texas economy flourishes, many workers are being left behind in a job market that increasingly requires higher levels of skill and education. If we do not focus on both adequate jobs and a skilled workforce the Texas economy will ultimately falter, and hunger and poverty will increase.
- *Texas needs a stronger basic support system.* Benefits in the AFDC program are among the lowest in the country and the most restrictive. The buying power of these benefits has actually declined by 66% since 1970. Changes to this basic income support program must be designed to both encourage a transition to work and to remove the dollar for dollar penalties now incurred by families as they gain income or accrue assets.
- *Beyond a basic safety net, the state should provide the tools for economic independence.* The foundation of these tools is an adequate education that can ensure a successful transition from school to work. Too many low-income communities are served by education systems that are underfunded and unable to address the myriad of socio-economic burdens that come with the students they are trying to teach. Investments in a comprehensive, equitable education system are critical.
- *Job training in Texas must become more efficient and directed toward employment that will provide adequate income and benefits to support families at levels that allow them a life independent of public benefits.*
- *The state must be willing to ensure that medical care and child care continues long enough to provide a transition to independence.* As low-income workers move toward self-sufficiency and stable employment, support services are the stepping stones to long term success.
- *Knowing that government will continue to have a role in providing emergency support, temporary benefits and additional training, Texas needs to mend its tattered safety net to provide a coordinated, comprehensive set of supports that provides both incentives and tools for self-sufficiency.*

Improving Current Food and Nutrition Programs: The Interim Steps

Although ensuring that families have adequate income and resources is recognized as the definitive way to end hunger, this is a long-term solution will take both time and political will. Building family economic security is currently a component of many government sponsored anti-hunger initiatives, but there also exists a network of programs designed to address the immediate food and nutrition needs of low-income families. Although these programs, from Food Stamps to the Summer Food Service Program are underutilized by many eligible families, they have been successful in averting hunger and undernutrition in millions of American children. Abolishment or reduction of funding for these programs would only exacerbate childhood hunger, and leave many families with severely limited options in obtaining proper nourishment.

In this section, specific recommendations have been formulated for each of the major food programs addressed in the Texas CHIP.

Food Stamps

The Food Stamp program is a widely recognized, and effective food and nutrition program, it is also the most controversial. Nationwide, 27 million individuals currently receive food stamps. In Texas, 2.7 million individuals receive food stamps, 1.5 million are children.

Despite the proven importance of food stamps in alleviating hunger among low-income families, improvements in this program are necessary. It is estimated that only 63% of those eligible to receive food stamps benefits actually participate in the program. Texas CHIP data show a primary reason that families do not apply for food stamps is a lack of information about their potential eligibility. In 1993, the Texas Department of Human Services was mandated to begin a limited food stamp outreach campaign. This report recommends expanding those efforts across the state.

Despite high participation rates, concerns about fraud and abuse continue to plague this program. While there are cases of such fraud occurring, these incidents have often been exaggerated and remain small in relation to the scale of the program and efforts to properly secure against fraud are underway, more notably the implementation of the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) system.

Two other necessary improvements in the food stamp program are: 1) the implementation of a nutrition education component, and 2) an increase in the food stamp benefit levels. Many families participating in the food stamp program have limited knowledge in the selection, purchase and preparation of nutritious foods. Adding a nutrition education component to the program could greatly assist families in improving the quality of their diets. Lastly, only 10% of hungry Texas CHIP families claim they can feed their families for an entire month with their current food stamp allotment. An increase in benefit levels would allow families to adequately adjust to increases in costs of living.

FEDERAL LEVEL:

- *Congress and the President should continue to provide funding at current levels for Food Stamps and maintain it as an entitlement program in order to provide eligible low-income families adequate accessibility to food.*
- *A nutrition education component should be included in the Food Stamp Program.* Nutrition education would provide food stamp recipients with needed information that would guide them in making informed choices on food products and aid in the prevention of health problems related to diets lacking in proper nutritional content.
- *Congress should increase basic food stamp grants to an adequate level and raise eligibility ceilings.*

STATE LEVEL:

- *The Texas Department of Human Services (TDHS) should expand its food stamp outreach efforts by contracting with community-based organizations to conduct such projects in areas where eligible populations exist.* By developing clear and effective outreach materials for distribution, potential food stamp applicants will receive needed information on food assistance from familiar local organizations.
- *The state legislature should increase funding for food stamp outreach and obtain the maximum matching federal grants available for this purpose.*
- *TDHS should provide electronic equipment for Farmers' Markets and small grocers in low-income neighborhoods in order to provide EBT services which could be otherwise unaffordable in these locations.* Farmers' Markets provide nutritious and locally grown products and small grocers offer accessibility to food in low-income areas.

LOCAL LEVEL

- *Community-based organizations should provide outreach on food stamps in collaboration with other agencies and organizations. When appropriate, community-based initiatives for nutrition education should also be considered as part of expanded outreach efforts.*

Special Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)

WIC has demonstrated its effectiveness both in preventing health problems related to inadequate prenatal and child nutrition and in reducing long-term health care costs. As reflected in this study, however, there remains a need for ongoing outreach efforts and informational materials as well as expanded access to local clinics.

A commitment by Congress and the President to provide full funding for WIC by 1997 would increase the coverage of the program to all women, infants and children who are in need. Therefore, the following recommendations are made for WIC:

FEDERAL LEVEL:

- *The President and Congress should continue the track towards fully funding the Special Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children by 1997 and subsequently maintain its full funding.*
- *The Farmers' Market Nutrition Program should continue to be included and maintained in funding for WIC.*

STATE LEVEL:

- *The Texas Department of Health should actively recruit eligible sites for the WIC program in underserved areas.*
- *The Texas Department of Health should pursue technologies permitting expedient processing of WIC coupons at grocery store check-out stands.*

LOCAL LEVEL:

- *Because of the growing need for WIC services, eligible organizations in local communities should consider becoming WIC sites especially in underserved areas.* When possible, collaboration with other agencies and providers should be explored.

National School Lunch Program/School Breakfast Program

In addition to the National School Lunch Program, the School Breakfast Program demonstrates great potential in contributing to a child's learning ability and intellectual development. Unfortunately, this program often goes underutilized in many schools.

Because these programs are integral to the educational development of children and youth, it is important that their roles be recognized and fully integrated into the school day. The following recommendations are made for the school lunch and breakfast programs:

FEDERAL LEVEL:

- *Congress and the President should secure adequate funding for school based nutrition programs.*
- *Nutrition standards should be maintained for all school-based meals.*

STATE LEVEL:

- *Texas Education Agency should ensure every student's right to a "barrier-free" meals.* This would ensure that sufficient time is available for every student to eat breakfast and lunch.

- *The Texas Education Agency should encourage schools and school districts with a high number of students eligible for free and reduced lunch to offer universal free lunch and breakfast.*
- *Nutrition education should be a component of school curricula at every level.*

LOCAL LEVEL:

- *Schools should provide opportunities for school breakfast to be integrated into a school's morning schedule through innovative means (such as delivering prepared breakfast bags to home room classes or having breakfast carts in hallways following first period).*
- *Schools and school districts with high numbers of students eligible for free and reduced lunch should explore possibilities for offering universal free and reduced lunch and breakfast in order to increase participation and diminish any possible stigma.*
- *Schools should make nutrition counseling available for students and screen students for existing or potential nutrition problems.*
- *Schools should make nutritious snacks and drinks (such as fruit and fruit juices) available for purchase and consumption by students instead of vending machine products and soft drinks.*

Summer Food Service Program for Children

For a great number of children from low-income families, school lunch is the primary meal of the day. When school ends for summer vacation, there is no assurance that there will be adequate meals available to them. The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) fills an important nutritional gap created by summer vacation.

SB 714 of the 73rd Legislature mandated school districts with 60% or more students eligible for free and reduced lunch to provide summer feeding sites. As a result, there has been a significant increase in state participation levels. By 1997, it is projected that 211 school districts will be SFSP sponsors. However, there still remains a large gap in participation in the summer food program in comparison to participation in free and reduced lunch. The following recommendations are made for Summer Food Service Program:

FEDERAL LEVEL:

- *Congress and the President should increase funding for the Summer Food Service Program.*
- *The U.S. Department of Agriculture should eliminate special restrictions placed on non-profit program sponsors. In order to encourage sponsorship of feeding sites, especially in underserved and rural areas, the amount of documentation required for sponsorship should be reduced for long-standing organizations and for organizations directed toward activities for children and youth.*
- *The U.S. Department of Agriculture should provide adequate funding and reimbursement for start-up costs, transportation to feeding sites and for providing nutritious meals in the SFSP.*

STATE LEVEL:

- *The Texas Education Agency should encourage school districts with 50% or more eligible students for free and reduced lunch to become SFSP sponsors.*

LOCAL LEVEL:

- *Non-profit organizations such as churches and organizations having youth activities should consider becoming SFSP sponsors. When possible, collaboration with multiple community organizations including potential partnerships with schools, should be considered.*
- *Local public-private partnerships with local organizations and business should be explored in order to obtain start-up grants for SFSP sponsorship and/or transportation to feeding sites.*

Other Programs

The programs previously discussed provide a strong safety net for low-income families. In addition, other food programs have been designed to provide assistance in cases of emergency as well as in sustaining proper nutritious foods. These programs often fill the gaps in food assistance by serving low-income persons through day care centers, homeless shelters, churches and other community organizations. In some instances they are a family's last resort to food.

- *Federal and state lawmakers should continue to maintain funding and administration for the following federal programs:*

  Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
  The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)
  Commodity Supplemental Food Program
  Senior Nutrition Programs
  Community Food and Nutrition Program (CFNP)
  Nutrition Education and Training Program (NET)

RECOMMENDATIONS TO LAWMAKERS, COMMUNITIES AND INDIVIDUALS

Lawmakers

Program evaluation and decision-making by lawmakers has a significant impact on the lives of Americans including children from low-income households. Many programs designed to assist poor Americans are in the process of being eliminated, reduced or significantly altered. Because so many children rely on these programs for basic needs, there is concern that insufficient mechanisms are in place to provide necessary assistance if current programs are scaled back. As elected officials, members of Congress have an obligation to maintain adequate food assistance for children of low-income families.

Additionally, Texas lawmakers currently face decisions on appropriating funds for housing, education, health and social services, higher education and the criminal justice system. Hunger is one of many issues that confront our state and because of its immediate need it is a very critical one. We urge our lawmakers to carefully consider the impact that changes in public programs may have on the low-income community, especially the most vulnerable: our children.

As solutions are sought to improve our communities, it must be noted that hunger is a condition that compromises the potential of both current and future generations. It is therefore recommended that Texas lawmakers make every effort to ensure that all Texans have access to food and that efforts to eliminate hunger from our state will be a priority now and in the future.

By developing comprehensive long-term strategies for low-income families and individuals, federal and state legislators have an opportunity to provide food security in all Texas communities. These strategies include creating jobs with adequate wages, providing effective job training programs, offering adequate childcare for working families and supporting other mechanisms which will allow families to work toward self-sufficiency. In conjunction with other efforts by communities and individuals, these strategies can make a significant difference in the lives of many low-income families.

Communities

Recent initiatives by community leaders have been successful in taking action on complex social problems such as teen violence, drug abuse and preventing school drop-outs. Because of the effectiveness of community-based responses, opportunities for similar efforts on childhood hunger should also be explored. Collaboration by community organizations, governmental agencies, churches and other institutions would contribute significantly in such

a campaign. Through a collaborative effort, ongoing partnerships will lead to the development of innovative approaches to providing food security for all. Community partnerships are strongly encouraged in the development of anti-hunger strategies.

Communities are further encouraged to examine those issues which can effect the accessibility of food assistance. In Texas, rural and urban areas often experience difficulty in providing access to food assistance due to transportation problems. Other issues for communities to consider are the promotion of available fresh produce through farmers' markets, the location and accessibility of grocery stores in low-income neighborhoods, and the provision of information on the selection and preparation of nutritious meals. The coordination of existing services and programs is often enhanced through a process of community planning. By developing a strategic anti-hunger plan, local communities can coordinate efforts, identify gaps and formulate a feasible means of addressing community hunger needs. Currently, several Texas communities have initiated such a planning process as a strong foundation for ending hunger in their communities and across the state.

Forming coalitions and developing strategic plans are primary steps in the development of an integrated approach to family food security. The formation of a food security council offers another strategy for instituting a comprehensive approach to food production, processing and distribution while creating empowerment for low-income communities. This is done primarily by providing technical assistance and some financing to communities which are developing comprehensive responses to hunger. On a state-level food security council, state agencies and organizations can provide support for the development of food policies and the delivery of food programs in collaboration with local councils.

An integral component of ending hunger is the contribution of many concerned individuals in the private sector. We have seen the importance of public private partnerships in addressing community problems. We strongly recommend the formation of these partnerships in addressing hunger in Texas and urge businesses to provide resources for these efforts.

Individuals

Concerned citizens have a number of opportunities to make a difference in eliminating childhood hunger. By directly participating in the decisionmaking process and by providing resources to anti-hunger efforts, individuals can make a significant contribution to providing community food security for all. The following action steps are provided for Texans who want to be a part ending childhood hunger.

- **VOTE** — Voting is a powerful tool in decision-making and directly impacts the attention paid to issues of hunger and poverty.
- **CONTACT ELECTED OFFICIALS** — By calling and/or writing elected officials, you can fully participate in the formulation of positive public policies, especially those which promote food security for all Americans.
- **BE INFORMED** — Find out which issues affect hunger at the federal, state and local levels. Also, become aware of other issues which may relate to hunger and food security in your community.
- **IDENTIFY SALIENT ISSUES** — Determine issues which may hinder effective food security and accessibility to food assistance in local communities.
- **GET INVOLVED** — A number of food assistance services exist in local communities such as food banks, pantries and soup kitchens, as well as advocacy groups. Consider donating, volunteering or working on hunger issues.

CONCLUSION

Every ninth child in Texas is hungry and every third child in Texas is at risk of being hungry. These are real children. They are on the local little league teams and they attend our elementary schools. They live in trailer homes, in rented apartments, and in homes owned by their parents. They are children who wake up with empty stomachs and who go to bed without enough to eat.

Childhood hunger is a problem that affects us all. When hunger prevents a child from learning, we all pay the price of their school failure. When hungry children become ill, we all bear the costs of their treatment. When hunger robs children of their natural resiliency and human potential, we all suffer the consequences of their inability to thrive. When hunger sentences children to a life spent at the margins, a sentence of success withheld, we all bear the burden. And the costs of our complacency are not cheap.

Because we have the ability to act effectively toward the elimination of childhood hunger in Texas, we cannot afford to despair. In the long run, economic security for families is the best solution for ending hunger among Texas children. To ensure continued economic security, there must be a strong safety net that provides the tools for economic independence and offers temporary support during times of emergency. In the short run, to ensure food security we must improve the food and nutrition programs already in place and expand them to serve all those who are eligible and in need.

The elimination of childhood hunger must become an issue which transcends political rhetoric, geographic boundaries, and socio-economic status. Eradicating hunger in Texas will require a unified effort by every voter and elected official, every entrepreneur and corporate leader, every parent, every volunteer and every policy maker. The time has come.

Children are hungry in Texas. They don't have to be.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Important Texas CHIP Terms

Texas CHIP families: The 715 families who completed the one and one-half hour Texas CHIP interview. To be eligible to participate in these interviews, the household's income had to be at or below 185% of the federal poverty guidelines at the time of the survey and there had to be at least one child under the age of 12.

Respondent: The person who was interviewed. Most often this was the mother.

Contributing Adult: Any adult who contributes to the support and care of the children. It could be a spouse, grandparent, boyfriend, etc.

Representative child: The representative child was the child with the most recent birthday in the household unless this child was under the age of one. In that case, the child with the second most recent birthday was considered the representative child. If the only child in the family was under age one, that child was considered the representative child.

Hunger: The mental and physical condition that comes for not eating enough food due to insufficient economic, family or community resources.

This measurement of hunger developed by the Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project attempts to detect food insufficiency due to constrained resources.

CCHIP measures hunger using a scale composed of 8 questions that indicate whether adults or children in the household experience food shortages, perceived food insufficiency, altered food intake due to resource limitations or inadequate food resources.

Hungry Children: Children in families answering positively to five or more of the eight questions utilized to measure hunger in the CCHIP survey. A score of five or more indicated that five or more different signs of hunger are present in the household and that at least one of these signs of hunger directly affects the children in the household.

Children at Risk of Hunger: Children in families answering positively to one to four of the questions utilized to measure hunger in the CCHIP survey. A score of one to four indicated that the family is "at risk" of hunger because it shows at least one sign of a food shortage problem

Children who are not Hungry: Children in families answering negatively to all eight of the question utilized to measure hunger in the CCHIP survey.

APPENDIX B
Staff

The Texas Childhood Hunger Identification Project is a project of the Center for Public Policy Priorities, the Austin office of the Benedictine Resource Center

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APPENDIX C
Project Partners

About the Center for Public Policy Priorities

The Center for Public Policy Priorities is an office of the Benedictine Resource Center (BRC), a San Antonio based non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of low-income and otherwise disenfranchised citizens in Texas. The Benedictine Resource Center was created in 1985 by the Benedictine Sisters of Boerne, Texas, after the sale of a hospital and nursing home in San Antonio which the sisters had run for nearly sixty years. In reassessing their mission and future direction, the sisters sold the facilities and created an endowment to support broader efforts aimed at improving the lives of Texas' poor.

Early activities of the Austin office of the Benedictine Resource Center focused on access to health care for low-income Texans. In February of 1991, the Austin office was renamed the Center for Public Policy Priorities, signaling a broadening of the issues upon which the office would focus. Today, the Center for Public Policy Priorities continues its tradition of leadership in health and human services policy, serving as an independent source of research and analysis of key issues, such as health care, hunger and nutrition, health and human services spending, taxes, early childhood care, welfare reform, and income security.

Current activities include: the conducting Texas Childhood Hunger Identification Project (Texas CHIP); leading the People First! coalition which works to support funding for health and human services in Texas; preparing the annual Kids Count county-by-county data book on indicators of child well-being; initiating the statewide Texas Anti-Hunger Network; and undertaking extensive research and analysis on state fiscal matters which affect low-income and disadvantaged Texans.

About the Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project

The Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project (CCHIP) is a national project sponsored by the Food Research and Action Center. In addition to providing solid evidence of the existence of hunger in other states where a hunger survey has been implemented, CCHIP research has proven to be a catalyst for public awareness and change. In every state where a CCHIP study has been completed, there have been significant policy changes that benefited hungry children.

About the Food Research and Action Center

The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), a 501(c)3, nonprofit organization based in Washington, DC, is dedicated to working for more effective public policies to eradicate domestic hunger and undernutrition. Established in 1970, FRAC today uses a wide variety of strategies at the national, state and local level to bring about an end to hunger in the United States.

FRAC released the findings from the first round of CCHIP studies in March of 1991, and launched the Campaign to End Childhood Hunger, illustrating the existence of hunger among American children and promoting positive changes in nutrition programs that feed hungry kids. FRAC is now sponsoring a second round of CCHIP studies to further update data on hunger, to continue to work on national solutions to childhood hunger, and to continue raising awareness of the issue of hunger.